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Letter about Tantrism

Dear Mr. Blofeld,

It was so kind of you to send us your book "The Way of Power" in Dutch, through Mr. van Eindhoven. We both want to thank you very much for your thoughtful gesture. You wrote in it: in memory of Bangkok Days, but fortunately, these are not just memories. This year I went to India and spent also some days in Bangkok in order to have Dhamma conversations with Khun Sujin (she went to one of your meetings more than a year ago) and the Australian monk Phra Dhammadharo, who has now a wonderful international Dhamma study-group.

Since I did not read the whole book yet, but I took it up at once we traveled twice in Nepal and did some trekking, visited the Tibetan monasteries and stayed on the grounds of one, in Jomson. We attended their services and found them so very kind and hospitable. You have the feeling you can understand one another even though one cannot communicate in language.

As regards your book, I find especially the examples you give of your own experiences clear, they make clear what the method is of the mental development you apply yourself to. I understand that also your goal is: detachment from the concept of "self". It seems you suggest this as a quicker method. Then you give an example of what you do when there is a disturbing noise: there was the noise of motorbikes and then you create in your mind an image of handdrums of a lama which you hear above the noise of a waterfall. I think here we have one of the essences of what you want to say in your book. But does it bring detachment from the self right at that moment? We each have different accumulations and if one is attracted to a certain way it is because one had accumulated that already for a long time, also in former lives. I may have accumulated also in former lives the way I follow when there is a disturbing noise. When I want to sleep and there is hammering in our building, there is aversion. But, what is it really? It is only sound. Sure, immediately we think of a hammer, and we have aversion, we (self, self, self) cannot sleep. There is not aversion all the time, are there not moments too of just hearing, in between? Hearing is not a self, only a phenomenon, a "nature" which experiences sound through ears. And then the sound: is it a hammer? No, it is only a phenomenon which can be experienced through the ears, that is all. And the aversion, is it a self, who has aversion? It is only a phenomenon, it arises because of conditions, because it was accumulated

already for countless lives. Now, I do not try to "convert" you to what I learned, but I would like to tell you that, although ~~the development of the understanding of realities~~ it seems a long, long way, I believe that is more beneficial than creating images in one's mind. When one creates those images, who is creating, it bring detachment right at that moment? I think we should check (I, myself too!) all the time whether the method we follow brings already a tiny, tiny bit of detachment right at that moment. If not, how could it ever bring detachment in future? But it is quite possible that I did not understand yet all of your book.

I find that I take the sound as less important, also whether I sleep as less important. The consequence is that I "relax" from akusala, not so disturbed as before. When we take "I" as less important: that is already a small step on the long, long way.

Now about the hurry: I do not agree that it has to be fast, I do not feel in a hurry. The more we try and want and desire for result, the less fast we go, and when we have found out that it utterly useless, we stop trying so much, that is my experience. And then there is a beginning of the development of wisdom which knows (not self knows) different realities in our daily lives. We live from moment to moment, we worry less, are more relaxed.

Many of your examples make me think of samatha. What you say is true: when the pupil is ripe a teacher turns up. Because everything which happens in our life does not happen by accident, our kamma and what we have accumulated bring us here and there. When we first hear a person teach Dhamma, we may not be ready for it. I had this experience. I listened to Khun Sujin a lot, and I thought: I had understood. But I had not really understood. Then it takes a long, long time, and one starts to understand. That is why I am never tired to hear the same old words over and over again.

I am not impressed by miracles at all, I know that when the right conditions have been accumulated, one can even stroke the moon and the sun, but the greatest miracle is the Dhamma: it changes people's lives. I realise this more and more, because how very hard it is to change one's accumulated inclinations, and still, Dhamma can do it.

About patience: After I came back from my pilgrimage to India I wrote some articles about the perfections of the Buddha (you mention them too in your book) which he had accumulated in his many lives as a Bodhisatta. I took up the Jatakas and I like them very much. He had to accumulate so much patience, how patient he was with other people (khanti) who tried to hurt him or murder him.

When he was the elephant Chaddanta he gave his tusks to the hunter, because the "tusks of omniscience" were a hundred thousand times dearer to him. He listened as a Bodhisatta to the teachings of so many former Buddhas, he had to accumulate wisdom and mindfulness for an endlessly long time. Why should we be impatient? If one is in a hurry it only brings frustration, and one becomes tense. It seems the "self" wants so much to hurry. One little moment of mindfulness of just sound as sound, hardness as hardness, of realities, not ^(being taken in by) "concepts", "Stories", "wholes", but being aware of realities appearing one by one through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body-sense or mind; they are like elements, but we put them together into "somebody", "something", we do not see them as they are.

Phra Dhammadharo I just mentioned, said that he had heard of someone who did not want to exchange a kingdom for a moment of mindfulness. Mindfulness, just for a "fingersnap", brings us nearer to detachment from the self.

But I understand if this is not appealing to you, since you are used to the Tantric method. But if one realises that even being used to a certain method is a mental phenomenon, arising because of conditions (accumulated in how many lives?) it is helpful. It is helpful for everybody, because then we take all we think, ^{all} we do for less important, less self in it.

Then you speak about the taking of a drug, in order to have already some foretaste, ^(of bliss) explaining that one should not become enslaved, but just use it. Is this not motivated by clinging? Clinging to bliss? Should we cling to bliss, will this bring detachment? Detachment is the aim, and I believe each little step we take should bring that tiny bit of detachment, so that the right cause brings the right result. There are many different mental moments (cittas) and they fall away immediately, but different qualities like attachment are accumulated. And what is bliss? It is also dukkha, it does not stay. It is only a mental moment, why should we find it so important? I would like to have more right understanding about myself, my life, and I believe this will lead finally to detachment.

I do not know whether you would like to read my articles on my Indian pilgrimage and the perfections of the Buddha, but if so, you could ask Phra Dhammadharo, he has the copies. (Wat Phleng Vipassana, Bangkok, it is in Thonburi). Every night his international group meets 6-8, and he is at the disposal of everybody so to say day and night. I do not know whether you have time, but you would enjoy meeting him. He is very sincere, very open-minded, you can talk with him about anything concerning mental development.

You also write in your book: no painful elimination of passions in the Tantric method, they are "used". The method I follow is also: no painful elimination (who can force anything), they are "used", because anything ~~that~~ comes up is object of mindfulness, no worry about it, it has arisen already. Thus, anger, desire, conceit, regret, anything unwholesome: it is only a mental phenomenon, it arises because of conditions, but their characteristics can be known. Nothing painful about that.

Thanking - you again for the book which gives a clear outline,

also kind regards from my husband,

Nina van Gorkom.